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ABSTRACT

This business education journal contains two articles and three class activities related to teaching business skills relevant to today's economy. The first article, "Skills for a Changing Economy," provides an overview of the skills needed in today's business environment. According to the article, as many as half of recent high school graduates leave school without the skills they need to succeed in the work force or in higher education, not because education is becoming less effective but because the knowledge required grows much more quickly than high school curricula can be updated. The article says that skills needed in today's business climate include soft skills (communication and team work), hard skills (basic mathematical and economic understanding, personal finance, reading, and reasoning), and technology skills (using the appropriate technology to carry out such basic tasks as word processing). The second article, "Teaching Business Basics," suggests cooperative activities and school-to-work programs that teachers can use to help students learn the skills they need to succeed in the business world. Ideas are presented for teaching communication and soft skills; technology skills; budgeting, credit, and computation; and international business skills. Three learning activities focus on hiring, budgeting and saving, and preparing to do business in Japan. (KC)

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Keying In

The Newsletter of the National Business Education Association

ED 456 238

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

Skills for a Changing Economy

The ongoing technology revolution, new business practices, and increased global trade have contributed to dramatic changes in the American economy. In the 1950s, 20 percent of jobs were professional, 20 percent were skilled, and 60 percent unskilled. In the 1990s, the percentage of professional jobs was approximately the same but skilled jobs surged to 60 percent and unskilled fell below 20 percent. In today's competitive world market, not only are American workers expected to know and accomplish more, but employers, parents, and society in general are requiring schools to do more to ensure that students are prepared for the complex demands of this work environment.

"Factories were once places for students who couldn't read or didn't have business skills," observes **John E. Clow**, professor emeritus at the State University of New York, College at Oneonta. "Those jobs are disappearing." As our economy continues to evolve from a manufacturing to a knowledge base, proficiencies in dealing with information and ideas, problem solving, and thinking critically are becoming essential in workers.

Richard J. Murnane and Frank Levy, authors of *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, point to Northwestern Mutual Life as an example of how businesses are requiring an increasingly sophisticated array of

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Teaching Business Basics

In **Darlene Voeltz's** economics classes at Rochester Community and Technical College in Rochester, Minnesota, students divide up into teams that take opposing stances on controversial economic issues affecting the local community. One issue polarizing Rochester, for example, was whether to upgrade the railroad tracks and bring in new, faster trains. The students conducted hands-on investigations of the issue, interviewing local townspeople, business owners, and government officials. Then they presented their findings to their classmates.

"Such exercises," says Voeltz, "help students gain insight into how everyday issues can affect everything from the prices they pay at the pump to their employment opportunities in the city." Economics is transformed from a theoretical subject into something that has a real and lasting impact on their lives.

In Massachusetts, the Winthrop public schools are part of a metropolitan coalition of 13 cities and towns in the Boston area that are devoted to exposing students to real-world work experiences. Nearby Logan Airport provides a number of opportunities for students to intern at such Fortune 500 companies as Hertz and Host Marriott, observes **Robert J. Capezza**, the school-to-work director for the Winthrop public schools. "Whether kids are general track or college track," he observes, "they learn to develop and demonstrate the skills they will need to function effectively in their future jobs and careers."

Enhancing the Teaching and Learning Process

The new knowledge and skills needed for the 21st century workplace have challenged business educators to re-examine their teaching practices. **John E. Clow** notes that there is a general movement in schools and among teachers to make learning more efficient and more relevant to students' current and future lives outside the classroom. "Lessons learned through hands-on activities tend to be retained better than material presented via the traditional lecture/textbook mode," he says.

Successful learning can no longer be defined as the memorization of facts; it involves the ability to apply an in-depth understanding of concepts to complex, real-world situations.

"Students," says Clow, "need experiences in the community and then the opportunity to reflect on those experiences." Capezza concurs. Reflection helps students evaluate their progress and set new goals for achievement. Other qualities he seeks to promote are the ability to make connections, to collect evidence that a problem-solving strategy is working, to organize ideas and institute a plan of action, to persist in achieving a goal, and to find personal relevance in the task at hand. All of these qualities or "habits of the mind" enhance learning by encouraging students to be active participants in the educational process.

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skills in their workers. Until 1982, the insurance company organized work by function. Workers were assigned specific, routine tasks, such as recording address changes for clients. Customers requesting other services were transferred to other employees.

Computer technology helped the company change its work organization to a more client-based orientation. Today any customer service representative can access on their computer screens information about all the policies held by an individual customer. Under the new system, a single customer representative is expected to accomplish a variety of tasks that were previously carried out by several workers. Representatives now have to find answers to sometimes difficult questions and deal effectively with complaints or other problems. They must demonstrate initiative and assume a wider scope of responsibility.

Addressing the Gaps in Education

Murnane and Levy estimate that as many as half of recent high school graduates leave school without the skills they need to succeed in the workforce or in higher education. This is not because U.S. educational quality has declined, they state, but because economic changes are outpacing schools' abilities to update their curriculums.

The skills gap in prospective employees has caused frustration among some businesses. Motorola's Robert W. Galvin, Chairman of the Executive Committee, and Edward J. Bales, Director of Education—External Systems, note that "educational improvement at the present rate will result in fewer and fewer young people being prepared for a global economy." The company hires only 10 percent of entry-level candidates who apply for employment at its U.S. division.

In a Business and Industry Forum conducted by the South Carolina Council on Vocational Technical Education, a representative from the E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co. stated that he needed to interview 1,500 people for every qualified 10 employees he hired. Many employers also cite inadequacies in basic skills as causes for poor worker morale and high turnover as well as impediments to advancement.

What are the new basic skills students need to succeed? Education experts and businesses outline three basic groups:

- **The soft skills**: the ability to work in heterogeneous groups and to communicate effectively in oral and written presentations;
- **The hard skills**: basic mathematical and economic understanding, as well as reasoning and reading abilities; and
- **Technology skills**: the ability to select and use the appropriate technology to carry out such basic tasks as word processing.

Communication

"One of the most frequent complaints we hear about graduates is that they lack communication skills" says Betty J. Brown, a professor and administrative assistant in the business education and office administration department at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. "Written communication skills are a critical need, especially with the wider use of e-mail." Telephone skills are also important, she notes, along with proficiencies in handling voice mail and person-to-person communications.

Linda G. McGrew, professor and chairman of the business education, marketing education, and office management department at Middle Tennessee State University in Mufreesboro, Tennessee, concurs. "In focus groups with local businesses, communication was the top skill they were seeking," she says. They want students who can use grammar and punctuation correctly. Whether preparing a sales letter to clients, writing a report for a supervisor, or negotiating a contract with a supplier, students must be able to adapt the style of their language to various audiences and target their specific needs.

Because of the popularity of presentation software, such as PowerPoint, students should also be adept at speaking in front of groups. And with the proliferation of project teams in the workplace, students need to be able to participate in group discussions and to communicate effectively with individuals from different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

Brown stresses that listening is another integral but often overlooked communication skill. "Students have to be able to listen and follow directions without being told again and again and without written instructions," she says.

At the heart of all communication is the transmission and comprehension of information. In an age when information is doubling every two to three years, students will need to be increasingly skilled at separating fact from opinion, synthesizing ideas from various sources, and evaluating the integrity of what they read and hear in different media, like the Internet.

A Renewed Emphasis on Soft Skills

Along with communication skills, McGrew notes, businesses are seeking a good command of the soft skills. Brown adds that employers want more than just a certain number of words per minute and an ability to use Microsoft Word and Excel. "A representative of one major employer in our area commented that her company will not hire new graduates because they then have to teach them that they must come to work on Mondays, whether they feel like it or not, they must work from eight to five and come to work on time, and they must give a fair day's work for their pay," she says.

Soft skills, which are often difficult to measure on standardized tests, include human relations, self-management, and workplace enhancement. Students need to develop a good work ethic and a positive attitude, as well as the abilities to work in teams and engage in critical thinking and decision making, Brown says.

The Committee for Economic Development notes that teachers who

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Clow and Capezza also stress the need for teachers to expand their expertise by keeping current with business trends. "Often educators don't know what is happening in the workplace," Capezza says. "After they obtain their teaching degree, their exposure to private industry is often limited or nonexistent." To enhance teacher awareness, instructors at his school often participate in summer externships at local technology or telecommunications companies such as Dell, Verizon, or Apple.

Every summer Clow runs an occupational trends course for teachers. "They visit businesses in the local community and learn about the jobs performed. There are readings, discussion, and job shadowing," he says. This kind of interaction between teachers and businesses helps promote mutual understanding. "While many business teachers don't have real experience in a business environment, many businesses also don't know the challenges teachers face every day in the classroom," he notes.

As educators and employers learn from each other and work together to improve the curriculum, the ultimate beneficiary will be the student, who will be better prepared for both the business world and everyday life. Some ideas for activities that are closely tied to real-world applications and that are organized by skill group are outlined below.

Communication and Soft Skills

Because communication skills are in such demand by employers, teachers need to emphasize activities that develop these competencies. Capezza has his students conduct mock interviews and write up their résumés. Students can also practice writing cover letters for their résumés that highlight particular strengths or complete research papers related to their career interests. These activities hone students' oral and written communication skills while also preparing them for the day when they will be ready to join the workforce.

In his management classes, Thomas Haynes uses case studies that allow students to develop their writing skills and to engage in critical thinking and problem solving. The goal is to develop the higher-order thinking skills that go hand in hand with communication that is articulate, accurate, and well organized.

Betty J. Brown recommends cooperative learning activities for teaching such human relations skills as teamwork, negotiation, and decision making. Group

Class Activity: Who Will You Hire?

You are a human resources staff member responsible for placing people in positions within your area—information technology. You want to select the best person for each position. Based on the descriptions below, which four people would you select for the following positions:

(1) An administrative support position which includes a great deal of keyboarding and working independently; little direct supervision from managers, but a great deal of responsibility for being sure tasks are completed correctly and on time.

(2) An administrative support position in which the person will work very closely with three managers, doing a wide variety of work including travel planning, keyboarding, handling phone calls, and coordinating a multitude of tasks; a high-pressure position.

(3) A supervisory position which requires coordinating the work of seven support staff positions (including the two described above); requires a great deal of organizational ability; involves working with 12 management people for whom the seven administrative staff provide support; managers stress that the person must have a great deal of tact, poise, and public relations skills; must be able to handle stress and multiple tasks at once.

(4) A team leader position with a great deal of project work; would work with different managers, depending on the project; would also involve some cross-training for handling phone calls and travel planning when needed; requires a "self-starter" who can work with a variety of personalities in a team.

Candidates

Jean: Likes to type; tested at 65 wpm; does not like working under pressure, but likes working for one boss; she was shy and hard to draw out in the interview, but appeared to be very eager to work; references described her as a hard worker who "does everything well," is an excellent proofreader, and is a team player.

John: Is mechanically oriented; has held administrative support positions in three companies; loves the challenge of deadlines; can understand and operate new equipment; likes working under supervision; interviewers were impressed with his poise and ability to express himself well verbally; references described him as a willing worker with good keyboarding skills, as a person who could be depended upon to problem solve when they had equipment or software problems, and as a team player but a "follower, not a leader."

Jason: Has held several administrative support positions with high levels of responsibility; has excellent keyboarding skills but dislikes keyboarding and feels a need for challenge in a problem-solving capacity; excellent at organizing and delegating work to others; impressed the interviewers with his poise, ability to converse, and quick thinking; references described him as a person who worked well in very diverse situations, but who seemed to become bored quickly with routine work; and as a person who was a leader able to inspire others to do good work. However, interviewers commented that he seemed to talk excessively during the interview.

Ralph: Possesses mechanical aptitude, but keyboards very slowly but accurately (about 35 wpm); works well under pressure; likes working alone; dislikes detail work; enjoys completing whole tasks; impressed the interviewers with his quick wit and poise; supervisors, who worked with Ralph when he worked for a software company in sales, described him as very personable, energetic, tactful, and diplomatic, a real "take-charge" person.

Sally: Has been a legal secretary for several years; enjoys detail work; works well under pressure; enjoys working with other people; in previous position, displayed an affinity for composing, editing, and doing research; enjoys being a support person and does not have management aspirations; her references described her as an excellent

CLASS ACTIVITY . . . continues on page 8

projects mirror the work teams and committees students will join in the workplace. Linda G. McGrew notes that heterogeneous teams, where individuals differ in their ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as in gender and abilities, will prepare students for diversity in the workplace and help promote tolerance and empathy for others.

Brown uses the role-playing Class Activity: Who Will You Hire? in her classrooms to facilitate students' thinking about their future roles as employees and employers. Students are faced with sensitive issues and potential personality conflicts that may come up in the hiring process. Child care, for example, should be an issue for the employee, not the employer making a hiring decision, she notes. Students also see the qualities that people need to perform competently in various jobs.

Technology Skills

As technology continues to reshape the workplace, students need to master a more sophisticated array of computer proficiencies in word processing, spreadsheets, PowerPoint, and Internet usage. Web design and desktop publishing skills are also increasingly in demand. A good project that allows students to utilize a variety of technologies is the writing, editing, and publication of a school newsletter or magazine using desktop publishing software, a word processing program, a digital camera, and the Internet for research. Students can also design their own Web pages or work in groups to create Web pages for a mock business start-up.

Digital portfolios, observes Haynes, are a good way to document the acquisition of technology skills. Not only does the production of a portfolio allow students to collect and creatively arrange examples of their best work, but it also provides them with a valuable tool to illustrate their accomplishments to prospective employers in interviews. Database application projects that involve gathering, recording, and analyzing data in order to answer questions about marketing a product or determining consumer preferences can help students learn to select and use the appropriate technology to complete a task.

Because technology advances so rapidly business educators must do more than teach the specifics of particular programs. They must also teach students efficient ways to acquire and apply new knowledge so that they can keep up with the constant upgrades in software programs and teach themselves how to use the new applications.

In addition to exposing students to a broad range of technologies, teachers must prepare students for the challenges that the use of new and emerging technologies presents. Students who are able to think critically and carefully about issues such as electronic privacy and intellectual property rights will be better able to handle the complex ethical dilemmas they may face as workers and citizens. A good exercise, for example, would be to discuss recent findings by the Privacy Foundation that the online activities of approximately one in three Americans are being monitored by their employer. The study can be found on the Web at www.privacyfoundation.org.

Budgeting, Credit, and Computation

The future economic success of students largely depends on how well they handle the money they earn. Responsible fiscal management helps ensure that they are able to purchase a home, provide for

Class Activity: Paying Yourself First

Doug earns $40,000 per year as a Web designer. He wants to save 10 percent of his monthly take-home pay of $2,233 (the amount after taxes and all other deductions, such as his company's health care plan) in order to save towards retirement and the purchase of his first home. However, like a lot of people, he has monthly expenses that exceed his take-home pay. Help him construct a budget that will enable him to meet his 10 percent savings goal without making a significant change in lifestyle. His monthly expenses are listed below.

Rent	$850	Two Cokes per Day From Vending Machine	$30
Utilities	$100	Newspaper Subscription	$15
Car Insurance	$42	Fruit Smoothies (One per Day)	$75
Car Loan	$300	Marble Slab Ice Creams (Two per Week)	$32
Gas for Car	$60	Large pizza (One per Week)	$40
Groceries	$120	Movie Rental Every Other Week	$16
Daily Lunches at Wendy's	$125	Drycleaner	$10
Rock Concert Ticket	$50	Clothing	$100
Dating (Once a Week)	$160	Weekly Scuba Diving Lessons	$48
Automatic Car Washes	$40		
Daily Espresso With Biscotti	$150		
Music CDs (One per Week)	$48		
Magazines (One per Week)	$25		
Pay per View (Twice per Month)	$10		

Total Expenses	$2,448
Take-Home Pay – Total Expenses	-$213

Discussion

Most people find that they can spend less and still live comfortably. The key to successful saving is to set aside the 10 percent designated for savings *before* paying any bills. This is commonly known as the principle of paying yourself first. The next step is to budget the fixed expenses such as rent and automobile payments. Finally, the variable expenses—movies, concert tickets, etc.—are budgeted. Many people are surprised at how much money they fritter away on relatively frivolous purchases. Doug, for example, spends $150 per month on espressos from the local java joint, $30 every month buying soft drinks from the vending machine, and $125 by eating out on his lunch hour. If he cuts back on his expensive coffees and brings in a brown bag lunch and a can of Coke a couple of times a week, he will be much further along in his savings goals. Ten percent of his pay is approximately $223. If he can save 15 or even 20 percent, he will be able to buy a new house sooner or retire at a younger age. However, in any budgeting plan it is also important not to eliminate all fun and entertainment. Even as he cuts back on eating out or buying music CDs every week, Doug can still enjoy his weekly scuba diving lessons. Budgeting is a matter of setting priorities and determining what one truly wants. A healthy balance of long, intermediate, and short-term goals will help ensure a successful savings plan.

their children's college education, and save for retirement. Saving is crucial to the economic well-being of the nation and to such programs as Social Security and Medicare.

One of the best ways teachers can help students understand the importance of sound money management is by having then create a budget, says Bill Reed. Students should list all their expenses—clothes, CDs, movies, car payments, etc.—and then analyze needs versus wants. Practicing the decision-making process of how they will allocate their funds will help them learn to set and reach financial goals.

Class Activity: Paying Yourself First illustrates how easy it is to live beyond one's means, regardless of one's income. "Most people," says Reed, "have no idea where their money goes every month and are simply living paycheck to paycheck." Keeping a budget and exercising financial discipline are the key elements for building wealth and providing for a comfortable lifestyle.

The Internet allows teachers to create a wide variety of interactive activities for their students, such as assignments that compare interest rates on home or auto loans at various banks. Students can also develop mock stock portfolios that reflect their understanding of investment principles. McGrew observes that the Jump$tart Coalition (www.jumpstartcoalition.org) can serve as a good source for locating a variety of educational tools, including computer software, books, and teaching guides. The *New York Times* Web site (www.nytimes.com/learning) has a daily lesson plan as well as a lesson plan archive.

Haynes has his students undertake Webquests where they analyze the annual reports posted on the Internet of various companies. The students study a company from an economic perspective—how fiscally sound is it?—and as a potential investment. Motorola, for example, was hit hard recently when the cell phone sector experienced a downturn. Students analyzed the company in respect to the overall sector and in regard to its competitors, like Nokia. Finally, they compared the two companies to determine which would offer better career opportunities. This kind of activity permits students to exercise a variety of skills in computation, investment analysis, and career development.

Class Activity: Preparing to Do Business in Japan

Concord Clothiers is a New York-based clothing company that has had great success making attire for businesswomen in the U.S. Ruth Owens, the CEO, would like to expand the business into Japan, but needs a better understanding of the country's culture and the needs of its businesswomen. Your assignment is to complete a report that covers the following areas of investigation:

- The role of women in Japanese culture and the occupations they tend to fill; compare/contrast with women in the U.S.;
- Attitudes of Japanese women toward Western clothing, including colors and styles;
- Most common women's clothing sizes in Japan;
- Major trade laws affecting the export of U.S. goods to Japan;
- The country's retailing environment and the major clothing retailers;
- Best means of transporting clothing to Japan and distributing it to major clothing retailers in the country's main metropolitan centers;
- Government agencies that have regulatory control over clothing manufacturing;
- Steps for gaining legal approval to do business in Japan; and
- Strategies for effectively introducing and marketing the clothing line to the Japanese consumer.

International Business Skills

To prepare students to live in a global community, teachers need to foster an understanding and respect for other cultures and peoples. A variety of cultural variables influence human behavior and business practices. Humor, for example, is a complex behavior that does not travel well across international borders and that requires sensitivity and awareness when conducting business abroad.

The worldwide accessibility of the Internet makes it an ideal tool for exploring business activities in other countries, the export/import regulations of a particular foreign country, or the political and economic news affecting markets around the world. For example, students can explore how the dollar's strength or weakness against the euro and yen can hamper or benefit U.S. companies dependent on foreign sales; or they can investigate and prepare reports on nonverbal customs and practices in other countries such as body/eye contact, dining etiquette, appropriate dress, etc.

The Internet also provides a venue for students to communicate with their counterparts in classrooms around the world as e-pals or through cooperative international projects, such as planning a global marketing strategy for a product or implementing an international business plan. Available from NBEA are such books as *Creative Teaching Ideas for International Business* and the Roger Axtell *Do's and Taboos* books. Major U.S. and international newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Financial Times* are other good resources.

Class Activity: Preparing to Do Business in Japan introduces students to some of the complex economic and cultural factors that must be taken into consideration when doing business abroad.

The Growing Importance of Business Education

With its emphasis on both a strong academic foundation and real-world learning experiences, business education is uniquely suited to providing the new basic skills that are critical to the success of all students in today's high achievement workplace, not just those planning a career in business. Business educators must take the lead in integrating new business practices, trends, and technologies into the classroom. To help them meet these challenges, NBEA is updating the *National Standards for Business Education*. Available this fall, it will serve as a guide for constructing curriculum, designing lesson plans, and evaluating students.

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take a firm stance against absenteeism, tardiness, sloppy work, and misbehavior are helping to establish essential work habits in their students.

"Businesspeople still judge applicants on their first impressions so the ability to make a good first appearance is vital," says Brown. Students should be aware of the impact of appropriate clothing, a neat appearance, punctuality, courteous interaction with others, tact, and diplomacy. They must also be aware of the impression given by body jewelry, tattoos, or unusual hairstyles.

Soft skills, she says, should be a major part of the business curriculum since they will affect students' ability to get along with other people both in their professional and personal lives.

Economics and Personal Finance

In January 2001, the personal savings rate in the U.S. reached a record low of -1.3 percent. This is in contrast to a positive rate of 4.7 percent in 1996 (see Figure 1). **Darlene Voeltz**, an instructor in business and economics at Rochester Community and Technical College in Rochester, Minnesota, notes that the average American family owes $7,000 in credit card debt. Few people realize, she says, that if a consumer owes $2,000 in credit card debt, pays only the minimum amount each month, and makes no additional charges, it will take 20 years to pay off this debt.

It's easy for students to learn bad financial habits when an attitude of "buy now, pay later" permeates American culture. According to the American Bankruptcy Institute, a record 1.4 million people filed for bankruptcy in 1998, an increase of 94.7 percent since 1990. Personal bankruptcies in 2001 are projected to exceed the 1998 record.

Bill Reed, a business and financial consultant in Mill Creek, Washington, notes that high school and college students are constantly bombarded with credit card offers and media messages to spend and enjoy a lifestyle of instant gratification. "They often don't realize that their credit reputation is one of the most valuable assets they own," he says. "Obtaining a mortgage or buying a car is almost impossible without good credit."

Observes Voeltz: "The goal of business education is to create conscientious consumers and good employees. If individuals know how to use their personal credit, then they will be more responsible employees using company credit." Many students, she points out, also want to start their own businesses and need to be able to handle the finances and understand their accountant's statements. They have to understand supply and demand and marketing.

"Now more than ever an understanding of basic economics and how it applies to their own lives and the economy in general is essential in students," observes Clow. The rules regarding lifelong employment have changed, with students having as many as six careers and 15 different jobs in a lifetime.

Not only are individuals in charge of their own workforce destinies, but they must also save for and manage their own retirement funds. Most employers no longer provide pensions. And when Social Security was first instituted, there were 12 workers for every retiree; that ratio is now a meager two to one. Only 28 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 to 34 believe that Social Security will be around when they retire.

Computation

Central to an understanding of economics and personal finance is a mastery of computational skills. These skills are also essential to effective work performance. Companies want employees who have a basic understanding of decimals, fractions, ratios, percentages, and measurements. They want employees who can read and interpret tables and graphs and solve business problems logically and effectively.

The mastery of such skills translates directly into higher wages, observe Murnane and Levy. In 1978, for example, the ability to follow directions and handle fractions and decimals affected wages six years after graduation by a modest 60 cents per hour or $1,200 per year for male high school graduates. By 1986, however, the difference between weak and strong basic math skills had risen to a wage difference of $1.33 per hour or approximately $2,700 per year.

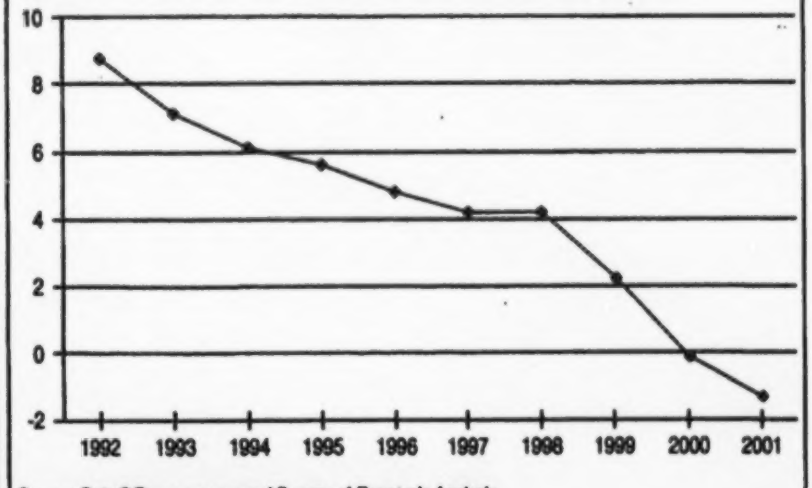
For female graduates the differences were more pronounced. In 1978, women who had graduated from high school with basic math skills earned 93 cents per hour more than those with weak math skills. By 1986, this difference had grown to $1.71 per hour or approximately $3,400 per year.

These differences are accelerating in the new millennium. The Institute for International Economics has found that less skilled workers are experiencing zero to negative real wage growth.

Technology Skills

Technology, especially the computer, is the defining force that has enabled us to

Figure 1. Savings as a Percentage of Disposable Income



Source: Data © Economy.com and Bureau of Economic Analysis.

work faster and more efficiently. In 1984, 26 percent of the workforce used computers on the job. In 1993, 48 percent of workers were using computers, and this figure is expected to grow rapidly in the new century as this technology becomes increasingly integrated into everyday objects and everyday life. Most businesses expect prospective employees to be able to produce spread sheets and word-processed documents, to use e-mail, and to research and retrieve information on the Internet.

Yet while job growth in information services and technology is flourishing, about half of the 1.6 million information technology jobs available last year went unfilled because of a lack of qualified workers, according to the Information Technology Association of America. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, computer and data processing services are expected to be among the fastest employment growth industries through 2006.

Business education can play a major role in teaching these technical skills as well as in providing an understanding of finance, management, and other business areas that give students a good blend of the competencies needed in the workplace today. Bob Cohen, senior vice president of the Information Technology Association of America, observes that "people need to combine their technical skills with business savvy to set themselves apart."

Thomas Haynes, a professor of business teacher education in the marketing department at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, notes that there is often a significant digital divide between traditional and nontraditional students regarding technology skills. For younger students, trained on PowerPoint and the Internet as early as kindergarten, turning to a computer may be as natural as picking up a pencil. Older adults, however, may feel more ill at ease around computers and therefore be more in need of courses to become proficient in new programs and emerging technologies.

Business education can help these nontraditional learners achieve the skills necessary to compete in the modern workplace. Indeed, currently about half of all adults are enrolled in adult-education classes.

Global Workers and Citizens

Without a skilled workforce, the U.S. will have increasing difficulty meeting the competition of a global marketplace. Employees adept at working with individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds will be in greater demand as companies continue to expand their operations abroad and international business becomes the rule rather than the exception.

More than 11 million Americans now work in jobs supported by exports. In March 2001, the U.S. exported $89.5 billion in goods and services and imported $120.6 billion in goods and services, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Department of Labor expects exports to increase by $560 billion by 2005. The Internet is helping to fuel globalization by creating a new venue in international trade and serving essentially as the virtual equivalent of a town market where vendors, big and small, can sell their wares to anyone in the world.

Even if they have no direct connection with a company doing business abroad, all American workers and consumers are affected by globalization. "For this reason," says Brown, "it is important to broaden students' horizons and make them aware of differences among cultures, the opportunities they have for work abroad, and the need for people in the U.S. who have language skills, including foreign language skills."

Business education can help students gain a global perspective by exposing them to different currencies and management practices and important legal-political considerations in international trade. Individuals who have a good grasp of the basic skills in conjunction with an understanding of the interconnectedness of all countries and peoples will be capable of functioning in global organizations and participating in the daily life of the "global village" that the world has become.

Meeting the Challenges of Today and the Future

The recent economic downturn has made it even more important for students to realize that they may face stiff competition for jobs and that they will need a mastery of the basic skills in order to stand out, says Brown. Indeed, the recent record layoffs have led to the most challenging job market since the recession of 1990–91.

To cope with the job market in good and bad times, students will need to be flexible and prepared to prove their worth every day in the business world. The best way to achieve that is through a good education.

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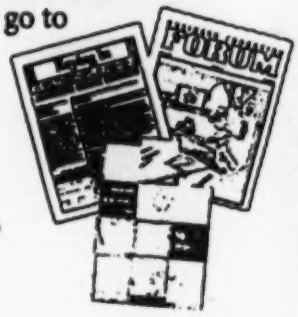

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Keying In Feature Story. . .

GETTING BACK TO BASICS

CLASS ACTIVITY . . . continued from page 3

worker with excellent proofreading, keyboarding, and composition skills; a person with an excellent attitude, work ethic, and ability to work well in team situations with others, but not as a leader.

Shannon: Has held several positions, each progressively more responsible than previous ones; works in your company but is interested in transferring for more responsiblity; references describe her as personable, energetic, a good organizer, a hard worker. You know her and have observed on two or three occasions that Shannon was in tears during her break. When you asked a friend who works with her, he commented that Shannon cries when things go wrong in her job. However, he hastened to say that such occasions occurred rarely, and he had learned just to "let her cry it out." She is an excellent keyboarder and proofreader and has a good deal of experience in handling complicated projects in which she demonstrated her organizational skills.

Carol: Has excellent keyboarding and proofreading skills, according to her references. Described as a person who "always does everything right" and needs little supervision; interviewers were impressed with her ability to analyze problems they posed to her as part of their interview process. She likes challenges and "always sees a task through to the end." She commented that in her last job she often worked overtime on her own volition in order to be sure everything was completed in a timely manner. She was somewhat concerned about the distance from her child care center to the company offices, since in her last job the day care center was just a block or so from her work.

Robey: Has held positions in two departments within your company and is interested in moving up in the company. In his past positions, Robey worked first in training, and then in information systems support, working with small groups of people who had responsibilities for the help desk and troubleshooting. Past supervisors commented that Robey is "very capable when focused and interested." However, they indicated that Robey can be difficult to work with if things are not just as Robey wants them to be. In interviews, the interviewers presented scenarios about situations that could arise, and Robey's responses indicated an impatience with others and sharpness with them when things are not going as Robey wants them to go.

Activity provided courtesy of Betty J. Brown.

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